

Middlesex Coalition for Children

Feb. 21, 2017

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Appropriations Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. The Middlesex Coalition for Children work to improve outcomes for low-income children and their families in Middletown and Middlesex County and serves a wide range of families, schools, programs, and early care and education programs.

I write today to speak against proposed changes in the Governor's budget.

Connecticut's early care and education system is facing a crisis. Childcare is unaffordable, increasingly unavailable, and the closing of the Care 4 Kids program this past summer has only added to the problem. Since August, over 2500 families have joined a waiting list. Supports for vulnerable families are overextended and the Governor's budget exacerbates the problem.

The proposed budget keeps Care4kids closed for the next 2 years. It cuts \$7.4 million from Care4kids in FY18 and an additional \$2.6 million the following year. This would keep Care4Kids closed to all but current TANF families for the next two years. The impact of these cuts will be that as children age out, Care4Kids will largely cease to pay for early childhood services and become in practice, a school age program. This will have serious implications for the economic viability of many early care programs, threatening care for full-pay children who receive no subsidy.

The budget cuts \$7.7 million from the Early Care & Education line item in FY18. That translates to approximately **1,100 children who won't get infant/ toddler, preschool or after school care next year.**

The budget **block grants** vital multiple programs, including Family Resource Centers, and shrinks their budget, creating infighting for a smaller pie. It **eliminates** Community Plans for Early Childhood, Improving Early Literacy, EvenStart, Healthy Start, and Help Me Grow. It **cuts** Head Start, the Child Care Quality Enhancement funds, and moves Birth to 3 to the Department of Social Services, creating new problems for an already overextended program. **Dismantling, or otherwise weakening the Office of Early Childhood will not lead to improvements in quality, ease of use, or amount of care available, and those are the ultimate goals for our system and our children.**

Each of these changes whittle away at the strong early care system that Connecticut has been working so hard to create.

We started the year with a \$33 million deficit in the Care 4 Kids program. I know the budget is bad, but **the alternative to fixing the hole in the Care 4 Kids budget is worse:** families out of work, children in unsafe care, and more families using expensive entitlements because they *can't* work. This will impact our state's employers of skilled low-wage workers, whose workforce is harder to replace when they become unavailable. And, if centers aren't receiving the income they need to stay afloat, there won't be care for the subsidized *or* full pay families. It just won't exist.

Improving the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County.

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I know how difficult the issue is, but the real lasting solution is solving the Care 4 Kids system, and indeed the entire system of early care and education, the money it needs to run quality programs that are available for families in Connecticut. This saves our school districts money in special education funds, it saves the state money in entitlements, and it helps our state to function properly.

We have an untenable achievement gap in Connecticut, and this gap starts early. We cannot give an inch when it comes to quality or quantity in our early care system. We need an appropriately funded early care and education system and we cannot compromise on quality.

I urge you consider these issues when creating your budget and adequately fund our early care and education system in Connecticut.

Thank you,



Izzi Greenberg
Executive Director